ONE SHILLING

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Mail Interception & Telephone Tapping in Britain

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SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE
is waiting for a letter from you

— G.P.O. ADVERTISEMENT

Some of the readers of this pamphlet may themselves have experienced interference with their mail and, if they resemble most of our informants, they may have expressed little irritation and even less surprise at finding their personal correspondence delayed and/or opened. The most common reaction seems to have been: "Hello – they're at it again!" It is partly because of this attitude that we have produced this pamphlet. The essence of democracy is full accountability, and at each and every point that this is denied to us we must resist strongly and immediately, exposing the underlying rottenness in which each denial has its roots.[1]

The protective screen which the State erects between itself and the people on the many occasions when the freedoms of the individual are disregarded – the screen on which is written "In The Public Interest" – must be removed. We hope that this pamphlet will make a small contribution to its removal.

HAMPSTEAD GROUP, COMMITTEE OF 100,
184 HAVERSTOCK HILL, LONDON, N.W.3.

A PHONE CALL
brings you together

— G.P.O. ADVERTISEMENT

WHO IS WATCHING YOU?

OUR MAIN SUBJECT is letter-intercepting and telephone-tapping, but these are simply techniques, employed when convenient or necessary by Britain's political police, the Special Branch, as a daily part of a perpetual and far-reaching surveillance of British political life. If you are an active member of any organisation to the left of the Labour Party or to the right of the Conservative Party, if you work in the disarmament movement which embraces supporters of all political parties and none, if you are an active member of a shop-stewards' committee or an unofficial strike committee, you will probably be investigated at some time by the Special Branch.[2] If you are an officer of any of these organisations or a member of the Committee of 100, then you will probably appear in the political section of the files of the Records Department at Scotland Yard and your file will contain a summary of your notable political actions, your appearances in court, a recent photograph,[3] your particular political associates, your profession and, if you are prominent enough, notes of any particularly radical statements you have made in public – and, sometimes, in private. Some of you will be already marked as candidates for internment camps in the event of war.

Carefully tending these lists of activists are officers of the Special Branch who keep the files up to date with regard to changes of address, demonstrations or meetings attended, unofficial strikes organised, etc. When the Committee of 100 has a significant demonstration, the names and police-records of known supporters are often taken to the local police station ahead of the demonstrators so as to be available at the court when the magistrates ask: "Anything known?"[4] Copies of these details are often also kept at the police stations nearest to the homes of those concerned.[5]

The Special Branch of the CID, like so many British institutions, has no clearly defined section duties. It is a semi-secret service which works in reasonably close contact with the intelligence branches of the armed forces and with M.I.5.[6] It often leaves its work to the normal police forces and, although many of the larger provincial branches of the CID have their own Special Branch, normally CID men in every police force will act as agents of the Special Branch.[7]

Predecessors of the Special Branch most probably have their origins in the same time as the beginnings of the machinery of the State. Charles II had a special letter-intercepting service and on the 25th of May, 1663, a Proclamation was issued which forbade the opening

of any letters or packets by anybody except by the immediate warrant of the Principal Secretary of State. Letter-interception has been performed by state officials unremittingly for the subsequent 302 years.[8] During the eighteenth century, spies and informers were employed by London magistrates. From about 1770 to 1850, the techniques of political surveillance became increasingly complex alongside the growth of the State machine and working class movements, particularly the Chartists. By 1840, spies, informers and *agents provocateurs* were employed by magistrates, Lords Lieutenant, military commanders, Chief Constables and even by private individuals who acted as sub-contractors for the authorities. They were sometimes, but not invariably, paid by the Home Secretary from the Secret Service Fund. A small specialised force was formed in 1842 by the Metropolitan Force, but it mostly relied on the information of private spies and the information provided by ordinary constables. Postmasters and Factory Inspectors were also expected to gather what information they could. In 1842 twenty warrants to intercept mail were recorded, mostly concerning the correspondence of Chartist leaders such as Feargus O'Connor and some concerning that of middle-class radicals – even the letters of Richard Cobden were opened because of the Government's suspicions that the Anti-Corn Law League was involved in the Plug-Plot disturbances. Ways of concealing interception became increasingly sophisticated.[9]

The Special Branch itself was founded in 1883 to combat Irish nationalist societies and now has a complex nation-wide network of political surveillance. It is described by Mrs. J. M. Hart in *The British Police* as

> " . . . in a sense the political police for the whole of the country. It aims at collecting information about 'undesirable' political persons and movements wherever their headquarters are situated. . . .[10]

The 1945-51 Labour Government formed a special squad of the Special Branch to investigate " Communist " influence in the trade unions and to keep watch on unofficial strikes.[11]

The Special Branch's methods of surveillance will usually include a reliance upon informers and, where this is not possible, the infiltration of an organisation by actual Special Branch members who may try to attain an official position which has access to correspondence and files. They sometimes also include the use of *agents provocateurs*.[12] Where informers or members will not serve, telephone-tapping and letter interception will most likely be employed. A variety of ingenious electronic devices have rendered wire-tapping an old-fashioned method of overhearing conversations, however. Little is known about the extent to which the police use such methods as the portable radio equipment which can be concealed in a brief-case or on a person's premises or the parabolic microphone which can pick up conversations a third of a mile away or the beam which if played on a room window can transmit what is being said in the room to a room across the street or the pocket tape-recorder, etc., etc.[13]

Whatever the techniques it employs, if the Special Branch wants to find out the private, political or personal facts about you, you can be fairly sure that it can and will do so. The answer is to be as open in all your personal and political dealings as you possibly can be. This is the answer the Committee of 100 should choose.

Neither the Special Branch nor its close associates, M.I.5 and the armed forces' intelligence branches, are in the least accountable to the public. It is at least possible that they could be made accountable while the main mechanical devices they employ are letter interception and wire-tapping. This is why we document instances of these techniques. But the frightening variety of electronic devices becoming available diminishes that possibility daily.

THE LAW

WHEN A POLICE OFFICER goes along to the local Sorting Office and says: "Got anything there for John Smith? The Inspector wants a quick look at the minutes of the last Committee meeting", he, the GPO official and the Inspector are all acting beyond the law. The law is not clear on either kind of interception, but avowed Home Office practice appears in Section 58 of the Post Office Act, 1953, which exempts from criminal liability anyone who opens mail "in obedience to an express warrant in writing under the hand of a Secretary of State." A warrant for interception of letters, telegrams or telephone calls may be requested by Government Departments, Police Authorities, the Security Services and the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Report of the 1957 Committee of Privy Councillors (Lord Birkett, the late Sir Walter Monckton and Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker) recommended that the conditions of issue of such a warrant should be:

(i) There must be subversive or espionage activity likely to injure the national interest.

(ii) The material likely to be obtained by interception must be of direct use in compiling information necessary to the Security Service in carrying out the tasks laid upon it by the State.[1]

The individual has no redress for anything done in relation to mail or telephone interceptions, since the Crown is expressly exempted from claims for damages in these cases by the Crown Proceedings Act, 1947. The terms of the Birkett Committee's report "were drawn up so as to prevent the Committee from reporting on the legality of the power. . . ."[2] It came to the weak conclusion that "it is difficult to resist the view that if there is a lawful power to intercept communications in the form of letters and telegrams, then it is wide enough to cover telephone communications as well."

The Government first argued that the interception of mail was performed under the authority of the Royal Prerogative and was part of a more general prerogative power to intercept all communications.

But no decisions of the Courts recognise that this power exists, nor does any authoritative study of the Royal Prerogative mention it. Professor Harry Street comments:

> "The extent of the Royal Prerogative is a question of law, and it is not open to the monarch or government of the day to declare its extent for themselves. The ruling of English law in *Entick v. Carrington* that an official has no power to interfere with a citizen unless the official can prove affirmatively that the law confers on him such a power will be recalled."[3]

The alternative government argument was that the power had traditionally existed and had been used, despite the fact that no historical records showed how it arose. But this is merely an indication that the power had been used without lawful authority, not a proof of such authority. The Post Office Act, 1953, and earlier Acts provide no such authority:

> "The argument that such Acts validate interception is absurd; they merely state that people who commit such acts are not criminals."[4]

The only Act concerning wire-tapping is the Telegraph Act, 1868, which made it a misdemeanour for any official, contrary to his duty, to intercept telegraphic messages. There seems to be no lawful authority for the interception of communications and, though the Government accepted the recommendations of the Birkett Committee, there are no legal restrictions on its exercise of these practices. Professor Street concludes that:

> "If its contention that wire-tapping is legal be sound," – and Professor Street implies strongly that it is not – "it remains legally free to issue warrants to anybody to intercept any communications for any purposes."[5]

It seems unlikely that the Government even adheres to the publicly avowed practice of interception only by Home Office warrant or to the Birkett Committee's recommended restrictions. There seems no way that the public or its parliamentary representatives can keep a check on such practices. The Home Secretary appears to be under no obligation to reveal to anyone the number of such warrants issued, nor does it seem necessary for him to issue a warrant for each individual whose private correspondence or telephone calls he wants intercepted.[6] This may partly account for the ease with which the authorities seem to be able to inspect the mail of local Committee of 100 groups. There seems nothing to stop the Home Secretary from issuing a warrant authorising the interception of mail of, for instance, all members of the Hampstead Committee of 100 Working Group. This conclusion seems to be supported by the fact that in 1956 (the last year for which figures are available) there were only 183 warrants issued, all on security grounds. It strikes us as very unlikely that, with such an effective means of detection at its disposal, the Security Service should confine itself to asking the Home Secretary for only 183 warrants, *if the validity of each was limited to one person.* The only alternative conclusions seem to be either that the annual figures given to the Birkett Committee[7] were false or that interceptions are

performed without warrants, when circumstances demand speedy action.

One of our GPO informants wrote:

> "There is no doubt that postal investigation branch do go beyond their mandate of Acts of Parliament and Home Office orders."

A GPO informant told us of a practice in his postal district of blanket interceptions, when, on certain days, all the mail of foreign students attending a college of further education would go "Upstairs" to be opened. This was the only example of this sort we have received, but if it is true, either the warrants must be of a most general nature or interceptions must take place without warrant, as the informant we quote states.

Apart from lack of public accountability or control over the issue of interception warrants, the performing of interceptions and so on, there are at least two other points which give cause for grave concern. Firstly, almost all the work of the Special Branch lacks this accountability or control and an officer of the Special Branch thus appears to have a very dangerous freedom of action when engaged on an investigation of "undesirable political persons" and, in addition, he can fairly reasonably presume that his superiors will turn a blind eye to any over-zealous, i.e. illegal, methods provided that there is no danger of such methods being made public and causing embarassment. (The Special Branch, even more than other government services, lives in constant fear of "dropping a clanger".) At least one of the examples of interference mentioned later may be ascribed to the "personal initiative" of a police officer acting without authority.[8]

Secondly, there have been instances of a GPO employee, who held strong views about Communists or the peace movement, doing malicious damage to mail which bore external evidence of its origin. We mention this, because the activities of such people are often used to conceal bad handiwork by official interceptors.

IT DOES HAPPEN HERE

THE SUBSTANCE OF THIS PAMPHLET has been confirmed by a variety of GPO employees including postmen, inspectors and telephone engineers. One employee, after reading a draft of the pamphlet, wrote:

> "The substance of your pamphlet is sound enough to me and I can find no discrepancies in it. . . . Times of civil disturbance and political fermentation are the signal, in my experience, for great activity in letter opening and telephone tapping. In my own area, local Communists and students at the . . . college are constant victims. Investigation men work hand in glove with the local police and no doubt they supply each other with information gathered."

Most of the examples given below admit of two alternative interpretations other than that of official interception: either the mail was damaged by a GPO employee with a personal grudge or, if the mail was not intercepted or the telephone not tapped, then either the

sender or the recipient of the message was a member or informant of the Special Branch. In some instances this may have been the case, but it could not credibly be true of all of them and certainly not true of the large number of cases on the files of the National Council for Civil Liberties which recently stated quite bluntly:

> "There is, in practice, no secrecy of the post or of telephone conversations."[1]

MAIL INTERCEPTION

TO KEEP SUPPORTERS INFORMED of their events and activities, the Hampstead Group of the Committee of 100 sends out monthly circulars. Posted in sealed envelopes and looking no different from less radical correspondence, these are sent out to about 150 people living in the Hampstead area. Having sent off the circulars on the afternoon of Sunday, August 18th, 1963, Andrew Papworth a Group Co-Secretary was rather surprised to receive on the following Monday afternoon a telephone call from Superintendant James Harris of Hampstead Police Station, who asked him about the events mentioned in the circular, in the exact order in which they were listed and even about a party which was mentioned. Emma Weighill and several other Committee members never received the circulars sent to them.

Since this incident was yet another in a long chain of suspicious happenings, the Hampstead Group released details to the Press of interference with their mail. The newspapers who commented on our reports included *The Guardian, The Sunday Citizen, The Hampstead and Highgate Express, The Hampstead News* and *The Times.* A letter from one of the Group secretaries was printed by *The Guardian* and one from the other Group secretary by *The Guardian* and *The Spectator.*

Apart from the predictable denials from GPO spokesmen, the Press reports resulted in a letter to one of the Group secretaries from someone in a Government Department – the Board of Trade – which said, in part:

> "Dear Miss Buxton,
>
> I shall have to do this anonymously in view of the Official Secrets Act.
>
> You may have guessed, or perhaps you knew, but anyway I confirm that the Postal Authorities can intercept letters at the final delivery office. They are sent to the Investigation Branch at GPO Headquarters by special messenger, who waits whilst they are examined, and then returns the letters for normal delivery.
>
> No doubt this is what is happening to your mail – this one may slip through in view of the envelope[2], and it's worth a try. You could put another letter in the paper of your choice if it does. Anyway, best wishes to you and your efforts to restore sanity and peace to a pretty bleak world. . . .
>
> Yours sincerely,
> Well-wisher."

The following week the *Hampstead and Highgate Express* published a statement by Nicolas Walter, a one-time member of the Hampstead Group. His main point was that letter interception was as old as the postal service and should not surprise anybody; he went on to say:

> "When I worked at the Highgate Sorting Office in December, 1954, delivering post in the Holly Lodge Estate, the letters for Mr. Andrew Rothstein, the Communist writer, were sorted separately and then checked by a senior Post Office Official before they came to me. The Highgate postmen thought of this as a normal part of the system and didn't doubt that some of Mr. Rothstein's letters were opened. I feel sure this system still exists and that some of my letters and those of my colleagues are opened too."

Asked by the Press to comment on these allegations a GPO spokesman said, " We have no authority for doing this at all. We can only open mail with the express permission of the Secretary of State, and that only applies to individual letters." Another spokesman was reported as saying, " I can assure you that it would never happen as a matter of routine, which is what is being suggested." That seems plain enough, yet the National Council for Civil Liberties declares, " So frequently is letter-opening practised by the Post Office that there is an official form to be filled up by the officers whose duty it is to open and read letters."[3]

Postmen have their own terms for describing interference. They refer to the Investigation Branch as " the Gestapo " and say that a letter subjected to their attention has been " Upstairs." Such incidents cause little surprise among the GPO employees. A postman told us that when he had talked about an incident where a plain-clothes policeman had demanded to know the name on a letter he had just delivered, " the reaction back at my sorting-office was one of no interest."

Either we and our GPO informants, or the authorities, are plainly lying: take your choice, but before you do, here are just two more letter interception incidents of the many which have been brought to our notice.

A 15-year-old pupil of a boarding school in Sussex posted a letter from his school to the Communist Party of Great Britain at its offices in King Street, W.C.2. The next day his Headmaster received a visit from a local policeman, who told him that a letter to the Communist Party had been opened and found to have been sent by a pupil of the school. To his credit, the Headmaster protested at such an invasion of privacy, but we can't help wondering if the Home Secretary had issued a warrant authorising the interception of the mail of a schoolboy!

Inez Randall[4] the Secretary of the CND, Southern Region, was so tired of finding " Opened in Error " stickers on her mail that she lodged a formal complaint. The investigator sent along by Reading Post Office was extremely apologetic and of the opinion that bad packaging was to blame. His parting remarks are worth remembering: " If the authorities had opened your mail, Miss, you'd never know they'd done it!" There is some truth in that, but only some.

Letters to members of our own Group have sometimes taken 2 – 6

days to reach Hampstead from other parts of London, and some letters have not been received at all. (A number of the delayed letters have been kept as proof.) Parcels of leaflets sent by the Hampstead Group to addresses in North London and to Tom McAlpine[5] in Scotland in October and December, 1964, and which had been particularly well packed, were partly open on arrival. The North London recipient, Hazel McGee, Secretary of the North London Committee of 100 Group, wrote: "You may be interested to know that the parcel of leaflets when it arrived was neatly slit down half of one side. . . . ." Some recent letters from active Committee of 100 people outside London have carried a hand-drawn blue crayon "V" across the stamp. Delay is particularly noticeable around the time of major peace movement demonstrations. These delays and some disappearances might be explained as ordinary mistakes at the GPO but the delays around the time of demonstrations experienced by other Committee of 100 groups and some CND groups, sometimes over a period of six years or more, surely cannot all be due to mechanical or personal failures. Letters from abroad have also taken an exceptionally long time: Ken Weller[6] told us that he received an airmail letter from Japan which had taken 10 days. Granted, that does seem just possible – except that the gum was still tacky!

TECHNIQUE

THE WELL-KNOWN METHOD of opening letters by holding them over a steaming kettle is effective but messy, and is not normally used by professionals. Indeed in many cases it is not necessary to open an envelope in order to scrutinise the contents. Do-it-yourself enthusiasts can verify this by holding an unopened letter close to a strong light; in this way most type-written letters can be read quite easily.

The Security Service have special apparatus for examining letters by this method, the device they use being rather like the viewing screen found in X-ray departments of hospitals. If this method proves unsatisfactory, then the contents of an envelope can be extracted through one of the holes left at the tops of the gummed flaps. An instrument resembling a pair of very slim long-nosed pliers is used to wind the letter into a tight cylinder and to extract it without visibly disturbing the sealed flap. (We understand it is rather more difficult to replace the letter.) The commonest method is to use the bottom flap as opposed to the top one. Chemical solvents, plus a host of other equipment, enable the skilled interceptor to make copies of correspondence very swiftly and without leaving outward signs of his work.

Cruder methods are simply to retain or destroy the letter, to use an "Opened in Error" label, to write "Misdirected" on it or "Not known at this address," to pretend mis-delivery, to return it to the sender with an "Insufficiently addressed" note or to cover part of the address with the postage mark.

Why are so many letters delivered that have been obviously opened and clumsily re-sealed? Apart from the idea of the GPO employee

with a " personal grudge," there may be two reasons:

(i) Through sheer pressure of work or the necessity of speed, especially since the advent of the Committee of 100, the experts of the Post Office Investigation Department have simply not had the necessary time to give each letter their best attention.

(ii) Letters are being opened, either with or without authority, at Sorting Offices and/or Police Stations.

One thing seems certain – despite repeated denials by the Post Office and the Police Force: for a great many people in democratic Great Britain there is no such thing as secrecy of the post.

TELEPHONE-TAPPING

UNTIL 1937 the GPO took the view that anybody could intercept telephone communications; then the Government decided as a matter of policy that a warrant of the Secretary of State needed to be obtained before this was done. The Crown has no power conferred by law to tap telephones, but even if the police tap wires without a warrant, the evidence obtained is not rendered inadmissable to a Court (as it is, for example, in the U.S. Federal Courts). The Government accepted the Birkett Committee's recommendations, but it is difficult to believe and would be exceedingly difficult to prove that phone-tapping is kept within these limits, since the highest annual figure of warrants issued in any one year between 1937-57 is recorded as being 241. Professor Street makes an interesting point:

> " . . . the Government will do nothing to prevent police from persuading a telephone subscriber to let them have an extension to his telephone so that they can listen in to his conversation . . . the Government will not regard listening in on an extension . . . as an " interception " and so such listening remains free from the restrictions. . . ."[1]

Instances of telephone-tapping are much harder to substantiate than those of mail interception, because so many telephones are tapped as a matter of routine for a variety of technical reasons as well as for purposes of police investigation. It is probable that most of the organisations mentioned above have had their phones tapped at one time or another. Most Committee of 100 groups have alleged, and could reasonably suppose, that their calls and calls to them had been intercepted. Often the only evidence was the tell-tale clicking noises to be heard, if the phone was held after the caller had rung off, and these have now been eliminated. Sometimes, however, the police have turned up at small meetings or demonstrations arranged at very short notice where the only reasonable explanation was interception. Occasionally mischievous Committee members or those who have got tired of police tampering have arranged a fake, supposedly hush-hush, demonstration and have made absolutely sure that the phone was the only way that the information was passed: then one person has gone along to see a

group of policemen standing aimlessly around waiting for a belated and non-existent demonstration.

In November, 1964, the bulletin of the Committee of 100, *Resistance*, gave two examples of the way in which the phones of the Committee are tapped regularly. A supporter rang the Committee office to suggest a picket at the Egyptian Embassy and the writer was the only person he spoke to on the phone. A meeting was arranged for 3 p.m. the following day at Bond Street Underground Station. In order to avoid being tapped, the Committee member did all his phoning from public call boxes, asking people to be present at the picket. Yet the police were waiting for them.

More recently, a young sailor, Paul Valentine, absent without leave from his ship, told Douglas Kepper, then Secretary of London Committee of 100 on the telephone that he was meeting his girl friend at Charing Cross Station at 3 p.m. that day. When he got to Charing Cross an Assistant Provost Marshall was waiting to arrest him. As Douglas Kepper comments, "Assistant Provost Marshalls do not just 'happen' to be at Charing Cross Station unless they have been warned in advance." The Committee of 100 phone is frequently out of order as a result of constant tapping.[2]

Occasionally Committee members receive telephonic surprises through some technical freak or plain carelessness on the part of the tappers. Jane Buxton, co-secretary of the Hampstead Group recently picked up her phone and dialled a friend's number, only to hear a woman's voice inquiring: "Please can I speak to Police Sergeant 72?"

PUBLIC ATTITUDES

FOR SOME REASON, the public seems much more interested in telephone-tapping than in letter interception and a surprising variety of attitudes have emerged towards it. *The Guardian* reported in the "London Letter" of its 22nd June, 1964, issue that phone-tapping was now silent and more secret; its tone was one of humorous acceptance without a trace of condemnation:

> "Life for those nuclear disarmers and others who tacitly relish a poacher-gamekeeper relationship with authority is being drained of some of its colour by the increasing sophistication of telephone tapping techniques. Modern equipment produces no dramatic clicks to alert the James Bond reader, who must now rely entirely on his imagination. Authority remains as coy as ever on the subject, but I understand that there are now two lists of tapped telephones at the Home Office: one for 'politicals' and a larger one for criminals. . . ."

The *Daily Mail*, however, produced a leading article in an October, 1964, issue which told us that we must not allow telephone-tapping to become legal in this country. What it did not recommend was that the Government practice of doing it now without legal authority should

be stopped. Perhaps the writer was well-intentioned, but uninformed, or perhaps he wished to give his readers the impression that there is no such practice – we don't know. In the same month *The Sun* published half a page of readers' letters on the subject. Some were in favour of tapping in certain circumstances, provided every legal safeguard was made, but the majority were horrified at the idea that it should be allowed in this country. The contents of this pamphlet should let both kinds of readers into a secret.

Vaguely liberal people may generally suppose that a minimum of wire-tapping is necessary to maintain public order – provided that the Government is given clear and lawful and restricted authority with a specific warrant being issued by the Home Secretary, or, preferably, a High Court judge in each individual case; and that a record is kept of all interceptions and annual figures are published. Supposedly progressive people urge that tapping should be stopped, if it is illegal, or made illegal if it is legal. To both these types of people we can only reply that the practice is without lawful authority, but is carried on nonetheless and probably much in excess of the warrants granted or recorded. We would also ask:

(i) Is there any reason to suppose, in view of the Government's past behaviour, that records would be fully kept, annual figures accurate, restrictions or laws adhered to?

(ii) Even if all the conditions in the previous question were to be fulfilled, would not this be more likely to signify that the authorities had turned to the electronic devices described earlier (whose use would be most difficult to regulate) than that the Government had suddenly acquired a respect for the individual's privacy?

(iii) Would there be any certain way of ensuring that the conditions were fulfilled?

What is certain is that the public must be made aware of each dangerous encroachment on its freedom and must be prepared to take effective action against all such encroachments.

TECHNIQUE

A GPO WORKER, in *Solidarity*, Vol. 2, No. 4, describes how easy it is for police phone-tapping to be concealed – and consequently how difficult it would be to regulate such tapping. Telephone tapping is carried out at an average rate of 25 lines per exchange, per week. The avowed purpose is for "service checks" which are formally concerned with the number and duration of calls, not with their content and provide proof of the costs of disputed phone bills or information for the planning of new exchanges, etc. Tapping is also used for cases of malicious use of telephones.

Every week a list of numbers to be checked is sent to the local exchanges from the area Central Checking Exchange. The GPO worker comments: "This sheet is supposed to be kept under lock and key but is of course usually left lying around." Connections are made between the main frame and the Central Observation Panel, from

where connections to the Central Checking Exchange are made. The plugs in the main frame are left in until further orders are received. The worker goes on:

> "The workers in the local exchange know nothing of what is going on at the checking point. Tapping by police, etc., for political reasons (of course only with the Home Secretary's permission) is thus carried out with great ease and comparative secrecy."

The Guardian's "London Letter" article confirms this and adds a refinement:

> ". . . the job is always done without the knowledge of the switchboard staff by an engineer foreign to the exchange in question. Even he does not know why the line is being tapped: he just ensures that it will be done silently – and almost painlessly."

HOW TO GUARD YOUR PRIVACY

IF YOU BELONG to any of the organisations mentioned previously and if the authorities are really determined to intercept your mail or phone calls, they will find a way of doing so whatever the state of the law on the question. The only real answer is to refuse absolutely to play their own game – though they can be beaten at it, as the "Spies for Peace" may have demonstrated – to avoid all deception and secrecy and to have as open an organisation as possible.

In a few cases, temporary political secrecy may be unavoidable – when, for instance, a member of the Forces is absent without leave in order to obtain impartial and detailed legal advice and other help, before he conscientiously objects to further service (though it would be advisable for him to try to do this on a legitimate leave). Also, in many cases, those who may be under surveillance may wish at some time to keep deeply personal matters away from the prying eyes of authority. In such cases we can offer the following advice which will merely make it more difficult for the police:

DO make a record of the date and time of posting letters – and copies of important ones – and ask your regular correspondents to do the same.

DO use manilla envelopes and fold a blank sheet of paper around the letter before insertion.

DON'T draw symbols on the envelope.

DON'T take obvious precautions – cellotape round the envelope or excessively thick paper – with really confidential letters.

DO use the address of friends or relatives, if your own is suspect.

DO use phone boxes, if your own phone is suspect.

DON'T use the post or the telephone for really confidential messages unless you really have to.

DO make an official complaint and a public fuss, if you are as sure as you can reasonably expect to be that your letters or phone calls are being intercepted.

Conclusion

THIS PAMPHLET has dealt with only two of the ways in which the State seeks to suppress those who choose to challenge actions and values which we find repugnant. Other Special Branch techniques such as the planting of police spies (and other devices of the State such as the revival of ancient laws or the twisting of recent ones for purposes of political persecution for which they were never intended) are now commonplace. They are the price we pay for the "protection of the public interest," the maintenance of "public order" and the safeguarding of "security" when these are essentially the State's interest, order and security, not the people's.

As the State and communications become more complex, so the methods of misusing them become more refined, the opportunities for misuse increase and the possibilities of a surely verifiable and public accountability are diminished. Democratic accountability cannot, in any case, be obtained in isolated instances: accountability has to be complete or it is worthless, for there is no sure way of measuring it. Restrict or ban letter interception or telephone-tapping in isolation and the result will be an increase in the use of electronic devices. Legislate the Special Branch out of existence, in isolation from other issues, and the function will remain exactly the same, merely acquiring a new label.

We cannot hope for much from legislation against interception. What we can do is: clearly inform the largest possible number of people; resist State interference by being as open as possible, while attempting to guard our personal privacy; wherever possible, construct our own communications systems as part of the building of a parallel society to replace this one, building a society where the individual possesses the inalienable right to decide his own destiny.

Notes

Who is Watching You?

1. Professor Harry Street in his *Freedom, the Individual and the State,* Pelican Books, comments " One of the dominant characteristics of British Governments is that they resist any legal restrictions on the exercise of their powers: at all cost they will do no more than make *ex gratia* concessions of no legal effect." (p. 39)

2. Organisations under surveillance probably include: the Independent Labour Party, the *Solidarity* groups, the Socialist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Labour League, the *New Left* Clubs, the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, the Anarchist Federation of Great Britain, the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Committee for Communist Unity, the many Communist front organisations such as the British Peace Committee; nationalist organisations such as *Plaid Cymru,* the Scottish Nationalist Party, the Irish Republican Party and the Connelly Association; the Movement for Colonial Freedom; many parts of the peace movement such as the Committee of 100, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Campaign Caravan Workshops, the Peace Pledge Union, INDEC, the Fellowship Party, the Commonwealth Party etc.; some trade unions and many " unofficial " strike committees, shop-stewards' committees and the like, particularly in the basic industries, the docks and all forms of communication and transport; organisations such as the British Nationalist Party and the Union Movement. It is also likely that many individuals in the so-called " left-wing " of the Labour Party and possibly in societies urging reforms of the laws relating to homosexuality, abortion, etc., come under surveillance from time to time. " One estimate is that the records cover more than two million people " – Eric Clark, *Observer,* January 31st, 1965.

3. Photographs are taken of almost all peace movement demonstrations including moving films of large ones. The Campaign Caravan team which toured the country in the summer of 1962 was photographed in most places it went. Where protests are made about the taking of photographs – such as after the North-west CND march to Barrow in late 1964 – the police may be pressed into a great show of destroying the negatives *after* prints have been taken. The Norfolk police took photographs and finger-prints of every demonstrator arrested at the Committee of 100's demonstration at Marham RAF base on 11th May, 1963. Individual photographs and finger-prints have also been taken after other demonstrations.

4. It seems that names may even be sent abroad. When the Committee of 100's convoy going from London to Athens for the Hiroshima Day demonstration in 1963 was refused entry at the Greek border, there was a small card index on a table at the barrier, on the first card of which could be plainly read the words " Arrowsmith, Pat." Pat Arrowsmith,

of course, is a well-known supporter of the Committee, but had never entered or attempted to enter Greece, and was not even in the convoy.

5. Verified to the writer by sympathetic CID officers of two separate localities.

6. Much interesting information about M.I.5. can be gleaned from *Spyring: the full story of the naval secrets case* by John Bulloch and Henry Miller, Secker and Warburg, (1961).

7. See George Howard, *Guardians of the Queen's Peace,* p. 210.

8. See Howard Robinson's *The British Post Office: A History,* Princeton, (1948) and K. Ellis *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century,* London (1958).

9. The cut across the seal of a letter, alleged one M.P., was " so delicate that it almost required a double magnifying glass to follow its trace," and a double stamp was often applied to render illegible the postmark of the hour when the letter reached the GPO. Letters were sometimes simply suppressed, but the Home Secretary advised an alternative of forwarding it " as a ' Missent ' letter or any device by which the delay can be accounted for." F. C. Mather, in his chapter on " Intelligence and Secret Service " in *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists,* Manchester University Press (1959), implies that the Home Secretary probably continued interception without recording it even after the storm of criticism in 1844 and the *Report of the Secret Committee of the House of Commons on the Post Office,* 1844.

10. See J. M. Hart, *The British Police,* Allen and Unwin (1951), p. 117.

11. See *The Daily Herald,* October 21st, 1950.

12. See Wal Hannington's account of *agents provocateurs* in various organisations of the unemployed in the 1930's in his *Unemployed Struggles, 1919-1936* and Howgrave-Graham's *Light and Shade at Scotland Yard,* pp. 91-92: " Superficially such action is ' un-English ' . . . It isn't cricket; it's hitting below the belt . . . And yet there are circumstances in which something very nearly approaching it may be justified and necessary for protection of the public. . . ."

13. See *Street,* p. 40, and Vance Packard's account of such devices in the U.S.A. in his *The Naked Society,* Longman's. A simple technique is to plant an intercom which carries the sound to a transmitter hidden in a cupboard or another room and the sound is then transmitted to a receiver which may be up to half a mile away in a built up area. The equipment costs less than £20 and can be bought in radio parts stores. Closed circuit television might be used, though it is clumsy and expensive. Sophisticated devices can include the concealment of microphones in tie-clips, cigarette packets, hearing aids and even cocktail olives. A laser beam has been developed in the U.S.A. which can be aimed at a room several blocks away and reflects back a picture of everything happening. See Eric Clark, *Observer,* February 28 1965.

The Law

1. See *Birkett Committee Report.* Cmnd. 283.

2. See *Street,* p. 35.

3. *Street,* p. 35

4. *Street,* p. 36.

5. *Street,* p. 39.

6. *Mather,* p. 219, says that 18th century warrants had been vague and indefinite, large numbers of persons being included in a single warrant,

but after 1815 names were cited and the number of persons included in a single warrant did not generally exceed six. A check was kept by the recording of security warrants in a Private and Secret Entry Book, but Mather comments that, though no entries were recorded after the 1844 protests: "It may well be that the Home Secretary decided to make no further entries in a book which might be scrutinised by a future parliamentary committee." (pp. 224-5.)

7. See *Birkett Committee Report*, Appendix I.

8. *Street*, p. 40, comments on the planting of electronic devices: "One thing is plain: such evidence will not be rendered inadmissable merely because the police have to break into private premises in order to conceal the equipment there."

It Does Happen Here

1. See *Handbook of Citizens' Rights*, National Council for Civil Liberties (1964), p. 33.

Mail Interception

1. Andrew Papworth, 184 Haverstock Hill, London, N.W.3.
2. O.H.M.S. envelope.
3. *Are You a Security Risk?* National Council for Civil Liberties pamphlet.
4. Inez Randall, 97 Cockney Hill, Reading, Berks.
5. Tom McAlpine, c/o The Rowen Engineering Co. Ltd., 78 Middlesex Street, Glasgow, S.1.
6. Ken Weller, c/o 197 King's Cross Road, London, W.C.1.

Telephone-tapping

1. *Street*, p. 38. Nor will the Government do anything to prevent information obtained by tapping being handed over to some private body investigating complaints of breaches of professional etiquette by the person whose call was tapped. A Dr. Fox was removed from the medical register in 1959 for having unprofessional relations with a married woman patient, after information had been obtained and passed on in this way.
2. *Resistance*, Vol. 2, No. 11, November, 1964. p. 15.

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